

Mr. Stracey was promoted to the rank of Conservator of Forests in July, 1946, and became the head of the Forest Department as the Senior Conservator of Forests on the 15th August, 1947, the day India got her Independence. He became the Director of Forest Education in the Forest Research Institute, Govt. of India in March, 1955 and organised the Wildlife Club at the Institute and introduced wildlife preservation in the syllabus of the Indian Forest College and Rangers' Colleges. He was promoted as the Chief Conservator of Forests in March, 1959 and retired from Government service on January 31, 1961.

Mr. Stracey on retirement was given various assignments in foreign countries and later became consultant to State Governments in India in the matter of planning and development of Forestry. One of his last assignment

was to assess the current status and future prospects of the Asian Elephants under the IUCN/SSC in which he was the Convenor of the North Eastern Task Force. He was one of the founders of the Wildlife Preservation Society of India, and continued as its Vice-President till his death.

A prolific writer on wildlife conservation and management, many of his papers were published in journals all over the world. His books 'Elephant Gold', 'Wildlife Management of India' and 'Tigers' earned him laurels. In 1977 he was posthumously awarded the distinction of being included in its 'Roll of Honour' by the World Wildlife Fund.

He died on 9th June, 1977 at Bangalore after a brief illness.

L. C. DAS

RALPH CAMROUX MORRIS
(1894-1977)

Old-timers of the Bombay Natural History Society, and his many friends and admirers in India and abroad will be saddened by the death in London on 19 December 1977 of Randolph C. Morris, one of the oldest and most active members of the Society—an erstwhile coffee planter and owner of Honnametti Estate in the Biligirirangan Hills of Karnataka. Few readers of the *Journal* had heard of the Biligirirangan Hills before the 1920s. Their introduction to this fascinating corner of the country, and to the richness and diversity of its flora and fauna, especially the Big Game animals, came during the period between 1920 and 1958 through the shikar and natural history articles by R. C. Morris, a sportsman-naturalist in the finest tradition of an age that is past. He was a regular con-

tributor to the Society's journal and I recall the tingling anticipation with which many a budding young naturalist of the time—and aspiring big game hunter to boot—looked forward to his evocative notes on local natural history and his exciting encounters with rogue elephants and cattle-slaying tigers and his penetrating observations on the habits and behaviour of the abounding wildlife amongst which he lived. Ralph's knowledge of the jungles around him and of their products and inhabitants was profound. His unquenchable thirst for inquiry and the acuteness of his powers of observation and deduction, and the versatility of his interests, will be evident from the appended list of his writings in the *Journal* during the period of his residence at Honnametti and of his greatest activity in those



RALPH CAMROUX MORRIS (1894-1977)

(Photo: *Sâlim Ali*)

enchancing surroundings. Together with the contemporary writings of that other veteran sportsman-conservationist, Col. R. W. Burton, Ralph Morris's contributions—as E. P. Gee's at a later date—perhaps did more than anything else at the time to arouse the conscience of the thinking public and in creating an informed public opinion on the pressing need for wildlife conservation in India in the face of the rapidly deteriorating conditions. The destruction of forests for cultivation and settlement of an ever expanding population, and for industrial development and other purposes in the dubious process of modernisation had gathered alarming pace especially since the 1914-18 World War. Indeed it was largely due to the crusading zeal of these stalwarts, spear-headed by the Bombay Natural History Society, that the All-India Conference for the Preservation of Wildlife was called by the Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, in Delhi in 1935, which paved the way, after our Independence, for the creation of the Indian Board for Wildlife and all the statutory measures for nature conservation that have flowed therefrom.

Ralph was born in 1894 at Attikan, the first of the four coffee estates in the Biligirirangan Hills to be planted in 1888 by his adventurous and pioneering father in the midst of virgin evergreen forest, miles away from civilization and without roads or communications of any sort. The country was inhabited only by adivasis of the Sholaga tribe, and stiff with truculent elephants who were often vehemently resentful of the unwelcome human encroachment on their pristine domains. By the time the elder Morris died in 1918, as a result of goring by a wounded boar, he and some of his relatives had opened up three more coffee estates in the area, the last and largest of which, Honnametti, was planted by Ralph himself.

Ralph was educated in England at the Blue Coat School and Blundell's in Devon before coming out to assist his father in the planting business. He joined the Society in the year 1919 being, at the time of his death, the second oldest living member. In 1919 he married Heather, the daughter of a Scottish planter in the neighbouring Nilgiris, A. M. Kinlock, a well known shikari-naturalist member of the Bombay Natural History Society who, curiously enough, also got killed by a wounded wild boar! They made a harmonious couple with a close identity of temperaments and interests. Both were physically tough and completely self-reliant, revelling in their secluded life away from the bustle and hubbub of civilization, and sharing a deep love of the jungle and its denizens, both human and animal. In Heather, Ralph had found an ideal life partner, sagacious and efficient not only in managing the home but also the mundane business of running the estate with all the taxing and tiresome chores that went with it. Their unfailing liberality and selfless consideration for the plantation labour were fully reciprocated and went a long way towards maintaining harmonious employer-employee relations on the estate and amicable co-existence with their aboriginal neighbours. It was the friendly ties with the tribals that helped Ralph to gather his vast store of local natural history and jungle lore from his trusty sholaga trackers.

With the sponsorship of Mr. Arther S. Vernay, an American business magnate, Ralph jointly led the Vernay-Hopwood expedition to the remote Upper Chindwin region of Burma in 1935 to collect zoological specimens for the Asiatic Hall of the American Museum of Natural History, New York; in the same year he led another field expedition for the same institution, this time to the Malayan jungles,

to look (unsuccessfully) for the Javan or Lesser Onehorned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*). His accounts of these expeditions, published in the BNHS *Journal*, make interesting reading and are valuable records.

For 18 months in 1937-38 Ralph was the President of the United Planters' Association of South India and during Hitler's war (1939-45) he joined up as a volunteer officer, and saw active service in the Middle East and North Africa, notably in the siege of Tobruk. In the six years of his absence his wife ran the estate single-handed with unimpaired efficiency and marked success.

From the time of his return from war service, and up to India's Independence, he represented the South Indian Europeans in the Legislative Assembly in New Delhi. In 1955 he finally sold Honnametti Estate to the Birlas to return and settle in the U.K. where two of his three married daughters had already preceded him, the third being in the U.S.A. In the U.K. Ralph continued to strive for the conservation of Indian wildlife and was for many years, till his health began to fail, an active council member of the Fauna Preservation Society.

Those of Ralph's naturalist and shikari friends, like the writer, who enjoyed the privilege from time to time of being house guests in the Morris's' delightful home at Honnametti and of joining the indefatigable pair in rambles among those fascinating hills, or in quest of big game to shoot or photograph, will recall with the deepest nostalgia the informal graciousness of their hospitality and the atmosphere of affectionate warmth and sincerity pervading the entire experience. Small wonder that their friends, and such of the plantation labour and tribal sholagas as are alive after these 30 years, should still re-

member and speak of the couple with so much genuine admiration and respect.

SALIM ALI

Articles and notes published by the late Mr. R. C. Morris in the Society's *Journal*.

Birds

- A jungle-fowl problem. Vol. 32: 274
- Vultures feeding at night. Vol. 38:190
- The Vernay-Hopwood Upper Chindwin Expedition. Vol. 38: 647
- On the occurrence of the Banded Crake (*Rallus e. amauroptera*) and the Malabar Woodpecker (*Macropicus j. hodgsoni*) in the Biligirirangan Hills, S. India. Vol. 40: 763
- Bed bugs and swifts. Vol. 42: 658

Mammals

- Porcupine's method of attack. Vol. 26: 1040
- Panthers and artificial light. Vol. 27: 780
- Solitaries. Vol. 31: 517
- An elephant shoot on the Baragur Hills (Coimbatore dist.). Vol. 31: 720; Vol. 33: 86
- A tigress with five cubs. Vol. 31: 810
- Wild dogs and further jungle tragedies. Vol. 31: 811
- Wild dogs attacking cattle. Vol. 32: 211
- Solitary cow Gaur. Vol. 32: 215
- Worn-down tips of bison horns. Vol. 32:216
- Clicking noise made by Muntjac. Vol. 32: 216
- Peculiar cries emitted by Sambhar stags fighting. Vol. 32: 216
- Habits of the Porcupine. Vol. 32: 791
- On natural deaths in wild elephants. Vol. 32: 794
- Tiger 'pooking'. Vol. 33: 197
- Sambhar and wild dog. Vol. 33: 198
- Aborted tusks in elephants. Vol. 33: 202
- Wounded tiger returning to kills. Vol. 33: 425
- The sense of smell in Indian Felidae. Vol. 33: 695
- Are there more than one species of panther in India?. Vol. 33: 697
- Proportion of the sexes in tigers. Vol. 33: 972
- Wounded panther returning to 'kill'. Vol. 977
- Elephant mistaken for a tiger. Vol. 33: 981
- Encounters with elephants in the Biligirirangan Hills. Vol. 34: 237